

Chapter 11

Fond Parents,

I sit hear in darkness, alone, and I am paralysed....

Father bolted forward in his chair. "What?" he boomed.

"No, now just wait a minute," Mother said, waving him backward, and she began reading again:

Fond parents,

I sit hear in darkness, alone, and I am paralysed. My heart is a cold gray stone and I am paralysed with gloom. I walk about in darkness alway and my feet go SLUSH, SLUSH, SLUSH in the melting snow. I go SLUSH, SLUSH, SLUSH and gloom o'ertakes me. No one knows about all this but me. Even when the sun goes down I watch it SINK, SINK, SINK and darkness comes. For darkness and blackness are my kin folks, like you all, and I can tell it to the like of you all. But nobody else! The moon rises up. RISE, RISE, RISE. But it's yellow and no kin. So, like the black ghost that I am, I walk with my heavy gray stone and my feet go SLUSH, SLUSH, SLUSH. Farewell.

Your Obediant Servant, []

A.

For a time we just stared at each other and Mother, as she always does in times like this, took out her white handkerchief and

just sat there, holding it to her nose, not crying or anything, just holding it and staring at the wall.

"Let me see that," Father said. And he took the one sheet of theme paper and after putting on his horn-rimmed glasses, silently re-read Arthur's strange letter. He must have had a hard time reading it because even though it was a better example of Arthur's new handwriting, he had placed little round circles over every "i" instead of just plain dots, and, though pretty, the circles were so large in places that it made the upper line hard to read. "Do you guess Arthur wrote that?"

gal 41 "Oh, yes," Mother said in a strained high voice. "It's his new way."

"Doesn't seem to me Arthur ever put all those circles in one of his letters before."

"It's just something else he's learned," she said in the same high voice.

"Huh!" Father said, lifting one eyebrow. "Sounds like he's gone crazy."

"Oh, Allison! Don't. Don't say that!"

[~~What he said, though, pretty much fascinated me. The idea that Arthur really might be crazy pricked me with a kind of fear and a horrible picture formed in my mind, of Arthur, chained to a great iron chair in the attic, howling mad, and I shuddered, vowing I'd never think of that again. But Father made it all seem better when he suggested perhaps Arthur was suffering from an unrequited love. I asked him what that was and he said it was when one party does and the other doesn't. This was a much nicer picture, I thought--Arthur madly in love, like a movie star, and walking around with his huge gray stone because of it~~

all. So I didn't think too much more about it.

Not much was going on at home to take my mind off my worries either. One thing was we got this new rector at church. The fox-hunting rector from Virginia refused to come to Ashton so we got this very old man from Arkansas. We're not sure whether he fits in with the South or not, but we're being very loyal to him even if he does whistle his "S's". He'll say "Let us pray" and right where the "us" is, this whistle comes out, but he's pretty nice and it was kind of interesting having somebody new to talk about.

The only other event was, Mother caught me doing the most humiliating thing. What happened was Mr. Creasy---he teaches tap dancing and stuff---gave this review he gives every Spring. It was at the movies and everybody was in it, even very small children. I wasn't in it, of course, because I don't take, but Melissa and I went to it anyway. It was pretty good and the best one in it was May Beth Hughes. She's in the tenth and may go to Hollywood. She's ex-crutiatingly popular because she's short and smokes cigarettes in her car between classes. That night she wore this silver bathing suit, top hat and cane and after tap dancing onto the stage, sang "There's Gonna Be A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight." Everybody nearly died and they clapped so hard she had do it again.

Well, when I went home I started doing it in front of the mirror---just standing up there in my room, screaming my lungs out and right while I was shuffling on into the bathroom, MOTHER came in and told me I was disturbing Father downstairs. I don't know why that was so embarrassing---Mother seeing me trying to act like May Beth Hughes---but it was. Mothers are always find-

ing out things like that and it's terribly embarrassing. To me, it is.

So you see,
~~Anyway, as I say,~~ home was howlingly boring. About the only other thing that happened was Arthur's explanation of his peculiar letter. The day after I'd acted like such an idiot in front of the mirror there was ^{two} ~~another~~ letter from him. He had drawn the same round circles over the "i's" and I found it so I didn't have to sit around discussing it. It's stupid to me to always have to discuss something somebody's written. You ought to just read it, say "pretty interesting" and go on about your business.

I just went on and opened it before anybody else did. And right away I knew he was making reference to his peculiar letter because he started off:

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Well, how did you like it? It was part of this theme we had to write for English and Mr. Woodford spoke to me about it. He said it showed a pretty good feeling on my part. And Mr. Woodford writes for magazines and stuff. Poems. He's practically famous. He said for me to keep on writing and the only reason he gave me C was because of punctuation and spelling. Knox wrote one about this guy blowing his brains out and got D. Well, I gotta go.

Sincerely, □

A.

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I was astonished! I kept reading it over and over. Some famous poet up there telling Arthur to keep on writing like that! Finally, I went on into the library and sat in Father's red leather chair. I just sat there, staring. What if Arthur did turn out to be somebody famous, say like Mr. Hopper or somebody? The thought was entrancing. I kept having these visions of Arthur grown up. He was wearing his white lucks and going "Scratch! Scratch! Scratch!" all over the place.

It was a pretty sad vision, though, because I kept seeing myself, also. I was this pitiful old maid that had never hardly even been out of Ashton and I didn't have any friends ^{or} ~~of~~ anything because I was always complaining about my gall bladder. All I could do was go walking up and down the streets with a brown paper sack of food and an old black hat on my head. Arthur would be too busy getting famous to care what happened to me. Finally, I'd take to drink and die all alone without Melissa Stewart ^{or anybody} there because she'd end up marrying and having one million children to take care of.

~~[Gosh, but that was sad. Sometimes I think I'm insane. I'm always sitting around thinking up stuff like that about myself. I can sit there and cry over it for about a half an hour. Most people don't do that. They just sit around and think up all the good things that're going to happen to them. But for the life of me I can't ever think up anything good that's going to happen to me. I can think it up about other people but not about myself. I don't know why that is.]~~

That night at dinner, ~~though~~, Mother said she didn't think Arthur was going to become a writer. "There's never been one

in the family---on either side."

"And thank goodness," Father said.

gal 42 "Why, Allison, it might be rather interesting."

"Very," he said. "Who'd pay for his white lucks then?"

"Well, you don't know. Maybe Arthur will be successful at it."

"He gives every evidence of it now, of course." Occasionally Father can be very sarcastic---especially when it comes to Arthur. They don't have the companionship that I and Mother have. I know they like each other, and all, but ever since Arthur was twelve they got to acting very peculiar to one another. Sort of formal or something.

"I'm very proud of him," Mother said. "You know. I really think---I really do---that Arthur at long last may be getting over the hill. I really do---"

"He's getting over something," Father said.

I didn't listen any more. ~~I went right upstairs to my desk and wrote this story about this old woman dying down in the basement of her house. She was very poor and all alone, not even the cook was there. She had her booze bottle by her and her old black hat on. It was a very beautiful story and I thought of showing it to Miss Price at school, but the only thing Miss Price cares anything about is About Ben Adam. You know that poem, don't you? His poor tribe was always increasing and his room always smelled like a lily in bloom because angels kept romping around in there all the time. Miss Price thinks that's the most beautiful poem that was ever written. She's always saying it to us but I wish ~~she~~ she'd learn another one now. You get kind of tired of hearing it all the time.~~

and too,

Anyway, that was the end of Arthur's gloom letters. Exams were coming on, he said, and he was really studying. Also he couldn't wait to get home. "It'll be divine to be out!" he wrote.

"Divine?" Father said. "Where did he get that word?"

But the day Arthur finally did get "out", Mother and I had an ~~argument~~ argument. I didn't want to go to the train station to meet him. But Mother said she had never heard of such dis-loyalty. "Here your brother has been away for almost half a year and you don't even want to go the train to meet him!"

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~~turn~~ But Mother said she had never heard of such disloyalty. "Here your brother has been away for almost half a year and you don't even want to go to the train to meet him!"

I said I could see him later, but she told me to go right upstairs and put on my plaid dress; we were leaving for the station in a few minutes.

I ~~do~~ wish I could make you understand how I felt. When I think of it I guess what's really the truth is that I was almost afraid to see him. I mean he had been so many places and done so many things and I---I was still just me, untraveled and hicky. You know, what I mean, don't you? It's embarrassing for the other person if he suddenly sees you're this extremely hicky individual---especially if you're his sister and everything. Nobody wants to have a sister that way. But Mother didn't seem to be feeling like I was. At the train station she kept saying: "I wonder if he's changed, Allison? My, how exciting it is!"

Father was smiling too, that half-smile he gets when he really means it. Then the train came in! I listened to the roar of the wheels and the sound of the whistle and it was almost as if Arthur himself ~~were~~ ^{was} causing all that noise, coming home in a roar of glory. The train stopped and there was a moment of stillness before the doors began opening. Finally this porter jumped down and the three of us stood there smiling as each passenger descended. We were waiting for the moment when Arthur's round familiar face would suddenly appear and we could appropriately jolt into joy. But when the last passenger came down we stood there, still smiling somehow, ~~and~~ ^{and} Mother said, "I wonder where he is?" Father, then, asked the porter if there had been a

young school boy on the car. The porter said there had been.
But at just that moment Arthur appeared at the door. At least
I thought it was Arthur. I looked again.